

Gardening for bumblebees

Getting started



Bumblebees are loveable and hard-working insects, that provide a vital pollinating role, but their numbers and those of other insects, are in decline.

The importance of gardens as bumblebee havens is more significant than ever. The good news is you don't have to be an expert gardener to help bees; you don't even have to have a garden! A window-box, balcony or hanging basket will do. This guide is full of simple tips to get your space buzzing.



Simple tips for all bumblebee gardening

With 24 species of bumblebee in the UK, your gardening space, however small, can attract a surprising range of bumblebees. Here are three top tips to attract many different bumblebees:

- **Provide flowering plants from early spring to late autumn and winter.** Bumblebees forage for nectar and pollen for much of their annual lifecycle. Choose plants with long flowering times, and keep them flowering by 'deadheading' as flowers die.
- **Grow flowers with different shaped flowers** – some bumblebees with short tongues forage on open, simple flowers such as apple blossom while bumblebees with long tongues can forage on deeper tube-shaped flowers such as foxgloves.
- **Plant flowers in clumps or clusters** of the same type if you have space, to help bumblebees save energy and get from flower to flower more quickly.

Quick projects for small spaces and rental gardens

Buzzing balconies, patios and window sills

You don't need to have a flowerbed to help the bumblebees. Planting flowers in window boxes, hanging baskets and pots will attract bees to window sills, patios and balconies – even high up on taller buildings.

Use a good-quality, moisture-retaining, peat-free compost. Keep well-watered as the soil dries out more quickly in containers. You can add moisture-holding gels or watering globes which slowly drip water into the container. Alternatively, choose drought-tolerant plants which prefer drier conditions. Many of these plants are Mediterranean herbs that are great for bees and can also be used in the kitchen as well. In larger pots you can have shrubs and climbers, underplanted with small plants like heather, hardy geraniums, heucheras, alliums and muscari.



Simple seeds and bulbs

There's nothing more rewarding than seeing bumblebees feed on the flowers of plants you have grown yourself from seeds. You can sow annual and perennial plants on the

windowsill in early spring, then plant them out in early summer when they are large enough, and they'll be flowering in a few months. With dozens of seeds in each pack you can easily grow more than enough plants for less than the cost of a single large plant from a garden centre. Bulbs are also another easy way to get dozens of plants for little effort, and they all come back year after year.



Cornflower



Honeywort



Sunflower



Herbs



Chives

Perennials

Sedum

Bird's-foot trefoil

Sea holly

Verbena

Toadflax

Diascias

Bidens

Ageratum

Alyssum

Strawberry

Aubrieta

Swan river daisy

Bulbs & corms

Fritillary

Hyacinth

Muscari

Bluebell

Cyclamen

Allium

Allium

Crocus

Easy-grow annuals

Sweet pea

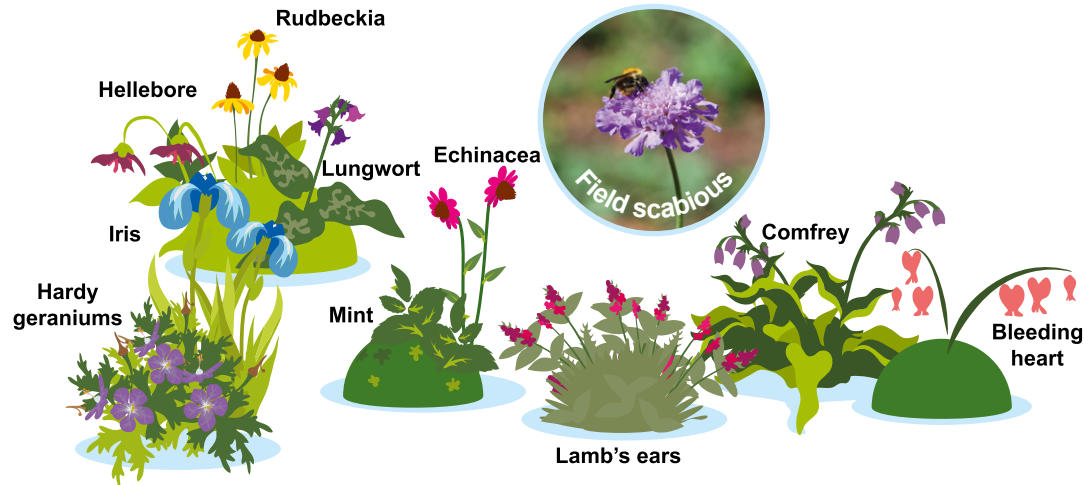
Zinnia

Linaria

Poppy

Nasturtium

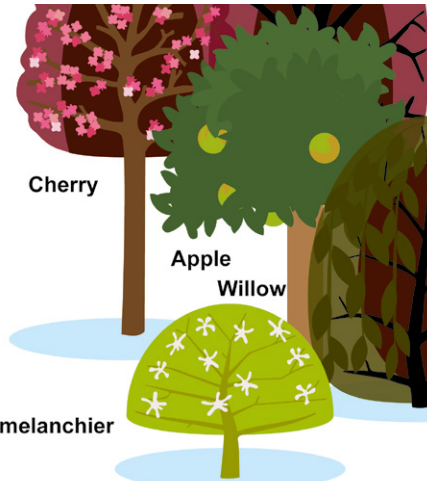
Calendula



Field scabious

Perennials – bee-appeal year after year

The vast majority of flowering plants are used by bumblebees, but here are some great recommendations. Those shown on the left are all regarded as herbaceous perennials, meaning that once established in the ground, cut back the dead stems in late autumn or early spring, and they will return year after year. You can also plant climbers, plant small trees and shrubs to attract even more bumblebees.



Cherry

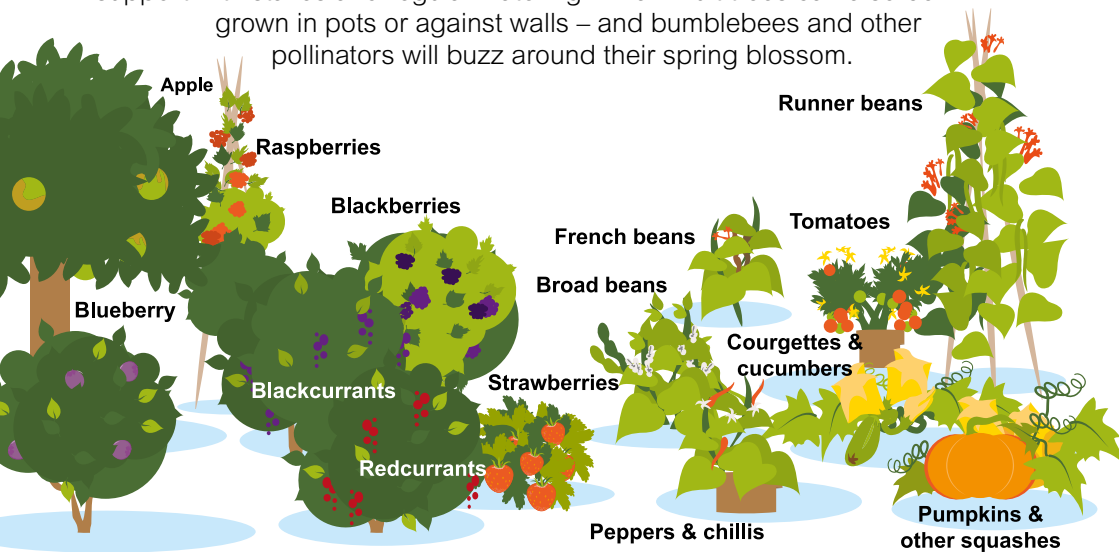
Apple

Willow

Amelanchier

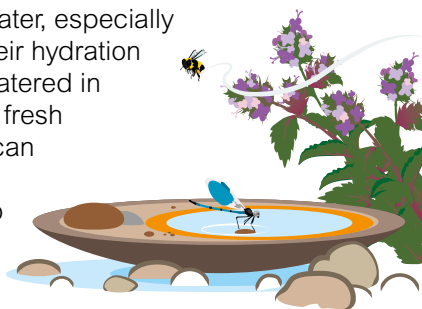
The best edibles – Food for you and for the bumblebees

'Grow-your-own' can provide delicious and nutritious food, and the flowers that develop into fruits and vegetables can provide important forage for bumblebees and other pollinators. Some plants, for example beans and blackcurrants are nearly always bee-pollinated, and can easily be grown in pots, grow bags or directly in the ground amongst other flowering plants. They needn't take up too much space although they might need vertical support with stakes and regular watering. Dwarf fruit trees can also be grown in pots or against walls – and bumblebees and other pollinators will buzz around their spring blossom.



What about water?

All animals need regular and reliable sources of water, especially in dry and hot weather. Bumblebees usually get their hydration from nectar and so it is important to keep plants watered in hot weather. It's also a good idea to provide clean, fresh water in shallow dishes, tubs and saucers. These can attract animals of all sizes – birds, hedgehogs and beloved bees, but be sure to add a miniature ramp or pebble steps to allow smaller animals to exit safely.



Pest control

Many 'pest' control treatments are extremely harmful to beneficial insects like bees. Even if you only spray the leaves, the nectar and pollen can become laced with pesticides which harm the insects which visit the flowers. Our best advice is to look into natural control methods. You can encourage beneficial predatory insects like ladybirds and lacewings into the garden, that will eat aphids and other garden pests.

Think like a bumblebee – and watch where they feed

Some varieties of plants have flowers with so many petals that bees simply can't get inside to access the pollen and nectar. Many varieties of roses and dahlia are like this.



Top tip

Think like a bee when choosing these plants. Can you see the centre of the flower? If so, it's probably a good choice! If you're not sure what to buy in the garden centre, let the bees do the work for you; select the plants that you see bees are visiting!

Unfortunately, many widely-used bedding plants are simply not good for bumblebees, offering little or no pollen or nectar – these include most pansies, petunias, begonias, pelargonium (annual geraniums) and busy lizzies. The good news is by avoiding these annual bedding plants, you can also make your gardening more low-maintenance. Once established, herbaceous perennials and shrubs grow and flower for years and just need an annual trim.



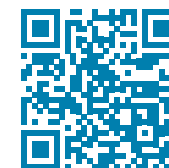
The perfect wildflower garden for bumblebees



Bee kind

Visit the 'Bee kind' section of our website to find out more about the best plants for bees for any garden situation.

beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org



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